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The *Gormond et Isembart* Legend in the French Monastic Chronicles of the Thirteenth Century*

Caterina Menichetti & Maria Teresa Rachetta

1. Research targets

In his general treatment of medieval epic as popular historiography, Joseph J. Duggan made the statement:

The effect of the poems on history [...] has been the object of very little study, but with the rise of a reader-oriented literary scholarship and the achievements of the history of mentalities, it assumes a new importance, merging with other considerations pertinent to the reception of medieval literature.¹

Following Duggan's suggestion, this inquiry aims to bring a new focus on to the use of epic material in French vernacular chronicles of the 13th century, adopting the Gormond and Isembart legend as case study.²

The use of epic themes and sources within the Latin historiography of the Middle Ages is better established and has been more widely investigated. The work by Rita Lejeune on Sigebert de Gembloux and by André Moisan on

* Caterina Menichetti was responsible for sections 1, 5 and 6, Maria Teresa Rachetta for sections 2, 3 and 4.

¹ Joseph J. Duggan, 'Medieval Epic as Popular Historiography: Appropriation of Historical Knowledge in the Vernacular Epic', in *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, XI: *La Littérature historiographique des origines à 1500*, t. 1 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1986), pp. 285–311.

² *Gormont et Isembart, fragment de chanson de geste du XII^e siècle*, ed. by A. Bayot (Paris: Champion, 1969); all references are to and quotations from this edition.

Aubri de Trois-Fontaines (and Guy de Bazoches) is well known.³ As far as the vernacular is concerned, the use of epic material in historiographical works has mainly been analysed with regard to Anglo-Norman texts of the 12th century such as Wace's *Brut* and *Rou*, Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* and Jordan Fantosme's *Chronique*, especially by Philip Bennett.⁴ Our aim is to focus on the more neglected French chronicles of the 13th century.

We have chosen the story of Gormond and Isembart as a case study because most of the references and allusions to the epic are already known, due to the outstanding relevance and complexity of the indirect tradition. Since the sole manuscript of this French *chanson de geste* (Bruxelles, KBR, MS II 181, fragment 3)⁵ is a two leaf fragment, our knowledge of the legend as a whole comes courtesy of non-epic texts. In addition, early contributions by Rudolf Zenker and Ferdinand Lot made it clear that the story of the invasion of Ponthieu by the Saracen king and the French renegade had

³ Rita Lejeune, *Recherches sur le thème: les chansons de geste et l'histoire* (Liège: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1948); André Moisan, 'Aubri de Trois-Fontaines à l'écoute des chanteurs de geste', in *Essor et fortune de la chanson de geste dans l'Europe et l'Orient latin: actes du IX^e Congrès international de la Société Rencesvals, Padoue–Venise 29 août–4 septembre 1982*, éd. par Alberto Limentani, 2 vols (Modena: Mucchi, 1984), II, 949–76; André Moisan, 'Clercs et légendes épiques: Hélinand de Froidmont, Aubri de Trois-Fontaines, Vincent de Beauvais et la *Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin*', in *Au carrefour des routes d'Europe: la chanson de geste. X^e Congrès International de la Société Rencesvals, Strasbourg 1985*, Senefiance, 21, 2 vols (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, 1987), I, 163–92.

⁴ Philip E. Bennett, 'L'épique dans l'historiographie anglo-normande: Gaimar, Wace, Jordan Fantosme', in *Aspects de l'épopée romane: mentalités, idéologie, intertextualités*, ed. by H. van Dijk and W. Noomen (Groningen: Forsten, 1995), pp. 321–39; Philip E. Bennett, 'La *Chronique* de Jordan Fantosme: épique et public lettré au XII^e siècle', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 40 (1997), 37–56.

⁵ The manuscript is certainly twelfth-century, see Maria Careri et al., *Livres et écritures en français et en occitan au XII^e siècle: catalogue illustré* (Roma: Viella, 2011), pp. 18–19.

extensive circulation within learned chronicles, and that this circulation was often independent from the *chanson de geste*.⁶

Unlike the work of Zenker and Lot, our inquiry does not propose to undertake the reconstruction of the original *chanson de geste*: the materials we are about to discuss here are, indeed, useless or almost useless for any such a reconstruction. Our purpose is, rather, to show some ways in which the legend emerges in a few French vernacular chronicles of the thirteenth century and to discuss their significance in context. Moreover, we would like to investigate whether these epic additions can help our understanding of how the compilers of French chronicles used to work.

2. The corpus

Historiographical production in French in the Middle Ages is incredibly wide ranging and complicated. In the following pages we will focus on a particular category of texts: vernacular chronicles dating from the 13th century, belonging to what we propose to call the monastic tradition. As the features of these works are far from being established, we think that, before coming to the Gormond and Isembart legend, some clarification is needed.

⁶ Rudolph Zenker, *Das Epos von Isembard und Gormund: sein Inhalt und seine historischen Grundlagen, nebst einer metrischen Übersetzung des Brüsseler Fragmentes* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1896), and Ferdinand Lot, 'Études sur les légendes épiques françaises. III: Encore *Gormond et Isembart*', *Romania*, 53 (1927), 325–42 — a response to Joseph Bédier, *Les Légendes épiques: recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*, 4 vols (Paris: Champion, 1914), IV, 21–101. The most detailed French account of the legend of Gormond appears in the *Chronique rimée* of Philippe Mousket, the main point of reference for Zenker and Lot, which will also be essential to this work. The only complete edition of the *Chronique rimée* is by the Baron de Reiffenberg (*Chronique rimée de Philippe Mouskes*, 2 vols (Bruxelles: Hayez, 1836–38)), now available on <<https://archive.org/details/ChroniqueRimeevol.1>> and <<https://archive.org/details/ChroniqueRimeevol.2>> (accessed 24 September 2014). On the undeserved poor reputation of this work among scholars see Peter F. Dembowski, 'Philippe Mousket and his *Chronique rimée* Seven and a Half Centuries Ago: A Chapter in the Literary History', in *Contemporary Readings of*

With the label ‘monastic chronicles’ we aim to define a group of works marked out both by their contents and their modes of transmission. These texts typically involve complex networks of sources and systems of techniques, which arose within monastic *scriptoria* of the tenth century.⁷ Such chronicles usually report facts and deeds from the most ancient times to the recent past, and derive from an often sophisticated compilation of previous materials circulating within the monastic centres of Europe. Indeed, the written memory preserved in the abbeys remained, for a very long period, the only source able simultaneously to provide information about the ancient past and a historiographical framework which could be exploited for the shaping of recent events into a historical account.⁸ During the entire Middle Ages, chronicles were continuously being reworked and updated;⁹ but, while several studies have been devoted to certain relevant aspects related to developments in this tradition in thirteenth-century Latin texts,¹⁰ less systematic attention has been given to the particular sort of production in which we are interested and which also had important implications for contemporary French literature.

Medieval Literature, ed. by Guy Mermier (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1989), pp. 93–113.

⁷ For both these aspects, see Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l’Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier, 1980; repr. 2011), especially pp. 46–55.

⁸ For the social aspects of this practice see Bernard Guenée, ‘L’Enquête historique ordonnée par Édouard I^{er}, Roi d’Angleterre, en 1291’, *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 119 (1975), 572–84.

⁹ For a general consideration of these techniques of compilation and transmission and further bibliography see Gert Melville, ‘Le problème des connaissances historiques au Moyen Âge: compilation et transmission des textes’, in *L’Historiographie médiévale en Europe: actes du colloque organisé par la Fondation Européenne de la Science au Centre de Recherches Historiques et Juridiques de l’Université Paris I du 29 mars au 1^{er} avril 1989*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Genet (Paris: CNRS, 1991), pp. 21–41.

¹⁰ On general features of historical compilation in the thirteenth century see Bernard Guenée, ‘L’historien et la compilation au XIII^e siècle’, *Journal des Savants*, 1985, 119–35; for contributions on specific aspects see also *L’Histoire et les nouveaux publics dans l’Europe médiévale (XIII^e–XV^e siècles): actes du colloque organisé par la Fondation Européenne de la Science à la Casa de Velásquez, Madrid, 23–24 avril 1993*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Genet (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997).

During the thirteenth century, as well as continuations to previous chronicles being undertaken, new Latin histories were produced. It is interesting to note that some textual evidence in these works seems to confirm what their main characteristics suggest: that they were written in order to provide plain and concise historical accounts for a wider public and especially for a lay audience. For instance the prologue to the work known as the *Historia regum Francorum usque ad annum 1214* — a text very popular among French translators — states: ‘pauca de multis breviter perstringens, nulla adiciens, aliqua ex parte, offero non solum studiosis, sed etiam secularibus negotiis implicatis, quorum animus, in multis occupatus, longos et perplexos sermones abhorret.’¹¹

From the very early thirteenth century, these new Latin histories deriving from monastic materials started being translated, and their French versions were immediately and broadly continued and rewritten. By the middle of the century, a prominent French tradition had developed; its first relevant examples are the chronicles of the Anonymous of Béthune, of the Anonymous of Chantilly-Vatican and of the Minstrel of Alphonse de Poitiers.¹² From its birth to its maturity, vernacular monastic historiography

¹¹ Victor Le Clerc, ‘Notices supplémentaires: chroniques’ in *Histoire littéraire de la France*. XXI: *Suite du treizième siècle: suppléments* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1847), pp. 656–779 (pp. 731–34); for complete bibliography, see *Repertorium fontium historiae medii aevi*, 11 vols (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1972–2006), v, 522. Such evidence suggests a certain caution with regard to the equivalence ‘clerics used Latin, laymen used French’, and to affirmations such as this by Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 179: ‘it was precisely during the reign of Philip Augustus that the earliest chronicles in French prose made their appearance, marking a decisive evolution in the historical tastes and concerns of the French-speaking lay world of the early thirteenth century. Until that time, lay taste for history had been satisfied by rhymed chronicles or epic *chansons de geste*, chanted history with a large component of legend and fiction.’

¹² For the Anonymous of Chantilly-Vatican, see Gillette Labory, ‘Essai d’une histoire nationale au XIII^e siècle: la chronique de l’anonyme de Chantilly-Vatican’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes*, 148 (1990), 301–54; for the Minstrel of Alphonse de Poitiers, see *Repertorium fontium*, vii, 571–72; the Anonymous of Béthune will be discussed in depth in section 4. A general overview of the French prose chronicles can be found in Spiegel, *The*

about France was strongly tied to abbeys like Saint Denis: in this specific milieu French monastic historiography found its Latin sources and later reached its peak, with the redaction of the *Grandes Chroniques de France*.¹³ These French chronicles had a wide circulation, generally maintaining their chief characteristics unchanged: prose form, narration from the origins of the French monarchy to the present day and a composition technique based on compiling, rewriting and continuing French monastic sources. A significant role in the spread of these texts was played by the counties and cities of the North-East, where monastic historiography not only circulated but also came in contact with the full maturity of French literature and became the source of such works as Philippe Mousket's *Chronique rimée*, a verse composition based on monastic sources while differing totally from a typological point of view.

The manuscript tradition of French historical compilations appears to the modern observer to be a real imbroglio, in which internal and external contaminations, rewritings and interpolations are not exceptions but the rule. In such a situation it is very hard to detect the actual relationships between texts and to isolate the different contributions. These are the reasons why these materials have been almost forgotten by editors since the learned studies of the last decades of the nineteenth century, namely those by Leopold Delisle and Paul Meyer.¹⁴ With the significant exception of Ronald N. Walpole, who

Past as Text, pp. 179–82 (on whose approach see the previous note). It is worth remembering that the three chronicles cited all have the *Historia regum Francorum usque ad annum 1214* among their primary sources, an element which confirms that the Latin text was regarded as a convenient source of historical documentation for the milieux to which the chronicles of the Anonymous of Béthune, the Anonymus of Chantilly-Vatican and the Minstrel of Alphonse de Poitiers were addressed.

¹³ For more details see Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline: Classical Folia, 1978), especially pp. 72–89 for the *Grandes Chroniques*.

¹⁴ Léopold Delisle, 'Extrait d'une chronique française des rois de France par un Anonyme de Béthune', in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, 24 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1738–1904), xxiv, 750–75 (p. 753); Paul Meyer, 'Discours de M. Paul Meyer, membre de l'Institut, président de la Société pendant l'exercice de 1889–

devoted a dense study to the relationships between the text of the Anonymous of Béthune and the *Chronique rimée* of Philippe Mousket,¹⁵ the prose vernacular chronicles dependent on monastic sources have been largely neglected — and remain unpublished. Thus far, the manuscript tradition, as well as the sources and specific compilation techniques of works like the *Grandes Chroniques de France* and the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*, which met with great success throughout the Middle Ages, are to a great degree still unexplored.

Many factors point to the necessity in modern scholarship for a new approach to monastic historiography in French and to its manuscript tradition. We are convinced that a more than superficial consideration of these texts could not only be of great relevance to the study of medieval historical writing, as Gabrielle M. Spiegel showed,¹⁶ but could also open enlightening new perspectives on French literature in general. Our purpose in the present paper is more modest: we aim to verify whether monastic chronicles can help to identify how epic themes and legends circulated and were considered during the thirteenth century from the peculiar and innovative point of view of the compilers of French chronicles.

1890: quelques vues sur l'origine et les premiers développements de l'historiographie française', *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, 27 (1890), 82–106; Paul Meyer, 'Notice sur le manuscrit li.6.24 de la Bibliothèque de l'Université de Cambridge', in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques*, 43 vols (Paris: Imprimerie de la République, 1798–1965), xxxii, part 2, 37–81. For an interesting appraisal of these enquiries see François Béthune, 'Les écoles historiques de Saint-Denis et de Saint-Germain-des-Prés dans leurs rapports avec la composition des *Grandes chroniques de France*', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 4 (1903), 24–38.

¹⁵ Ronald N. Walpole, 'Philip Mouskes and the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle', *University of California Publications in Modern Philology*, 26 (1947), 327–440.

¹⁶ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Spiegel, *The Past as Text*.

The French vernacular works in which we looked for allusions to the epic of Gormond and Isembart are the *Chroniques* of the Anonymous of Béthune, of the Anonymous of Chantilly-Vatican and of the so-called Minstrel of Alphonse de Poitiers and the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*. Such a broad examination of texts (and related manuscripts) became necessary in consideration of the great extent to which they share sources. The first step in our investigation was strict, mainly first-hand philological work, the results of which will be presented only in part here. This was necessary because, with the exception of the Anonymous of Béthune — whose Gormond and Isembart passage was printed by Delisle and, later, by Philippe Lauer¹⁷ — there are no complete modern editions of the works we took into account and, even where partial editions are available, those passages containing references to the Gormond and Isembart legend have not been published.

3. The texts

The historical texts in which the Gormond and Isembart legend can be found are the *Chronique française des rois de France* by the so-called Anonymous of Béthune and the text known as the *Chronique de Baudoin d'Avesnes*. In spite of the fact that both works pertain to monastic historiography, they are characterized by some important differences.

The Anonymous of Béthune's work dates from about 1223,¹⁸ while the date currently accepted for the compilation of the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* is about 1280.¹⁹ The first work has a rigid structure, in which only facts and deeds relating to the French crown are recounted. The second, by contrast, seems to have more blurred boundaries. It is a universal chronicle in which epic amplification is widely employed and in which we also find large

¹⁷ Philippe Lauer, 'Louis IV d'Outremer et le fragment d'Isembart et Gormont', *Romania*, 26 (1897), 161–74.

¹⁸ Delisle, 'Extrait d'une chronique française', p. 753.

¹⁹ Alphonse Bayot, 'La première partie de la *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*', *Revue des Bibliothèques et Archives de Belgique*, 2 (1904), 419–32 (p. 420).

sections devoted to local Flemish genealogies.²⁰ Last but not least, the *Chronique française des rois de France* is preserved in just one manuscript (Paris, BnF, MS n.a.f. 6295), while the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* has a very large tradition, with more than fifty manuscripts copied between the thirteenth and the early fifteenth century.²¹

4. The Anonymous of Béthune's account of Gormond and Isembart

The *Chronique française des rois de France* by the Anonymous of Béthune was probably written around 1223. It is, then, the oldest of those which we call 'French monastic chronicles', and displays the technique of historical writing in French at a still early stage of development. As already noted, the *Chronique française des rois de France* is preserved — missing material at the end — in a single manuscript. Internal evidence suggests that the chronicle in its current shape is the work of the same unknown author who wrote, probably shortly afterwards, the *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre*.²² This text immediately follows the *Chronique des rois de France* in MS BnF n.a.f. 6295, and is preserved in three other manuscripts.²³

The structure of the two chronicles is similar: in both cases, a compilation in French based on Latin learned chronicles is expanded upon

²⁰ On the use of the Charlemagne epic tradition made by the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* within the narrative deriving from the Pseudo-Turpin see Giovanni Palumbo, 'Carlo Magno tra i *Neuf Preux* alla fine del Medioevo: edizione del MS Paris, BnF, fonds français 12598 cc. 232^ra–243^ra', in *Autour du xv^e siècle: journées d'étude en l'honneur d'Alberto Varvaro*, ed. by P. Moreno and G. Palumbo (Genève: Droz, 2008), pp. 165–207.

²¹ For the manuscript tradition of the so-called *Chronique de Baudoin d'Avesnes*, see Marc-René Jung, *La Légende de Troie en France au Moyen Âge: analyse des versions françaises et bibliographie raisonnée des manuscrits* (Tübingen: Francke, 1996), pp. 432–35.

²² *Repertorium fontium*, v, 535.

²³ Paris, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 12203, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 17203 and Lille, BM, MS 536. On the textual transmission of thirteenth-century chronicles of Normandy see Gregory Fedorenko, 'The Texts, Manuscripts and Historical Significance of the Prose *Chronique de Normandie* and *Geste de France* (c. 1180–c. 1230)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2012).

with an original account of more recent events. The Latin texts employed relate to Saint Denis and Saint Germain-des-Prés for the French chronicle and Guillaume de Jumièges for the Norman one. Luckily, these sources are preserved in other manuscripts (in some cases in many manuscripts), so we are able to analyse the criteria by which the two compilations were put together. It is impossible to say whether the compilation work was carried out by the Anonymous himself or by a slightly earlier compiler.

It is evidently not viable to discuss the compiler's attitude towards his sources in detail (we summarize it in Appendix 1), but it is important to point out that the compiler's choice to move from one source to another does not seem to be due to defects in the sources. It is very likely that for the life of every French monarch the compiler had at least two different accounts at his disposal, deriving from different sources (namely the aforementioned *Historia regum Francorum usque ad 1214* and another French compilation mainly based on two other Latin texts, the *Abbreviatio gestorum Regum Francorum* and the *Descriptio qualiter Carolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit qualiterque Carolus Calvus hec ad S. Dionysium retulerit*), which he then chose between.²⁴ The final text thus derives from the juxtaposition of long passages taken from the two main sources. Contamination in detail is avoided, with the one exception of the Pseudo-Turpin chronicle, for which the compiler alternates two different French translations with no apparent motive other than his own taste.²⁵

We now come to the passage of Gormond and Isembart in question. The account of the legend is embedded within a section drawn from the *Historia*

²⁴ For the *Abbreviatio*, see *Repertorium fontium*, II, 100–101; for the *Descriptio*, see *Repertorium fontium*, IV, 173–74.

²⁵ On this specific feature see *Le Turpin français, dit le Turpin I*, ed. by Ronald N. Walpole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 190.

regum Francorum usque ad annum 1214, which makes no allusion to the epic.²⁶ The manuscript reads as follows:

MS BnF n.a.f. 6295, fols 37^b–37^v

Ne demorra gaires après ce que li Nor[37^a]mant vindrent par l'ewe de Loire sor France, et li dui enfant qui coroné estoient vindrent encontre els. Si en ocistrent assés, et assés en fistrent saillir en l'ewe qui noié i furent. Et puis s'en repairierent par la volenté de Dieu od lor ost od tote la victoire. En après ce departirent li frere lor regne entr'els. Looys ot ce de France qui estoit demorré del regne lor pere et Neustrie, et Charlemaines ot Aquitaine et Borgoigne. Looys se fist molt haïr a pluisors. Il cacha de France un haut home que on apela Ysenbart et cil ramena puis sor France un roi des Sarrasins trop riche et trop poissant, que on apeloit Gormont, qui destruisit Engleterre ains qu'il arrivast en France. Il arriva en Pontieu, qu'il destruisit. Ses gens arstrent l'abeïe de saint Richier et celi de saint Pierre de Corbie et toute la terre defors Amiens. Puis corrurent devant Arras et parmi Flandres dusqu'en Hasbaign. Quant Looys sot lor venue, il envoia espier lor afaire un chevalier que on apeloit Huelin, cousin celui Ysenbart. Et en guerredon del message qu'il fist, li quita Looys les reliés de France. Et cil fist molt bien son message et repaire sauvement od tout le boen cheval Ysenbart que il gaigna par engien. Et li boens cevaus enporta en sauveteit mal[37^b]gré les Sarrasins lui et un sien escuier. Ne demorra gaires après ce qu'il revint a Looys, que Looys asambla ses os por soi aler combatre as Sarrasins. Mais il ot eüe une bataille en cel tans es prés de sous Oreigni entre Raol le conte de

²⁶ See *Historia regum Francorum usque ad annum 1214*, in *Recueil des historiens*, IX, 41–45 (p. 42): 'Interim nunciatur quod Normanni, qui erant in Ligeri, terras illas depredarentur. Quo Ludovicus et Karlomannus cognito agmine conducto, in eos faciunt assultum: ubi multi ex Normannis occisi, et plures in Vigenna fluvio adsorpti perierunt: et exercitus illorum, Deo volente, cum victoria incolumis remeavit. Posthæc regnum paternum inter se dividunt: et Ludovicus quod de Francia residuum erat ex paterno regno et Neustriam possidet, et Karolomannus Aquitaniam et Burgundiam obtinet. Interea Normanni regnum Ludovici devastant, Corbeiam Monasterium et Ambianis civitatem et alia sacra loca occupant, de quibus non modicam partem occisis, ceterisque fugatis. Et ipse Ludovicus una cum suis retrorsum, nemine persequente, fugam arripuit, divino manifestante iudicio quia quod in Normannos fuerat actum non humana sed divina virtutem patratum extiterit. Proinde, dum contra Normannos usque Turonis pergeret, vir plenus omnibus immundiciis et vanitatibus Ludovicus infirmatus est corpore, et lectica deportatur usque ad S. Dionysii Monasterium ibique mortuus est et sepultus.'

Cambrai et les fils Herbert, qui haut home estoient, ou il ot tant de chevaliers ocis que s'os en fu molt mendre. Nonporquant il se combati et fu la bataille si fiere que pres furent tuit ocis, et d'une part et d'autre. Looïs meïsmes ocist en la bataille Ysenbart et en la fin le roi Gormont. Mais nonporquant toz i fust desconfist Looys se ne fust por les dames d'Amiens qui le secoururent et venquirent la bataille, et por ce sont eles encore en l'eglise Nostre Dame d'Amiens a destre et li home a senestre. Looys meïsmes fu tels conrees en la bataille qu'il onques puis n'ot santé, quar fu toz froissiés et toz desrous dedens le cors, et ce dist on que celi avint al ocire le roi Gormont, ki molt ot des siens ocis. Trente jors languï et puis morut, si fu enfoïs a Saint Denise.

Our first question must of course be: where did the *Chronique française des rois de France* derive the epic of Gormond from? A detail which the Anonymous shares with the much later Philippe Mousket²⁷ allows us to hypothesize that the Gormond and Isembart account came to the French chronicle from a source very close to that known to Philippe Mousket. In fact, the mention of the immunity from inheritance taxes is almost identical in the *Chronique* of the Anonymous of Béthune ('li quita Looys les relies de France') and the *Chronique rimée*:²⁸

si a dit au roi
s'il voloït laiscier son desroi,
et les reliés quites clamer,
et ses barons vosist amer
a l'ost de Sarrasins iroit
et leur pooir li rediroit. (14165–70)

Such an element testifies to a high degree of elaboration on the basic tale behind both the *Chronique française des rois des France* and the *Chronique rimée*.

²⁷ For the most significant parts of Philippe Mousket's account of *Gormond et Isembart* see Appendix 2.

²⁸ Besides these two texts, this detail can only be found in the later German romance *Lohier und Mallart*; see Lauer, 'Louis IV d'Outremer', p. 166; Lot, 'Études sur les légendes épiques françaises [...] *Gormond et Isembart*', p. 4, n. 1.

The survey of the compilation technique of that part of the *Chronique française* which is not original can help to verify the hypothesis that its Gormond account derives from non-learned and non-historical material. The Gormond and Isembart addition within the *Chronique française des rois de France*, indeed, stands out as an absolute exception to the tendencies displayed by the compiler elsewhere. The derivation of the account from a different compilation, that is to say another source comparable in length and structure to those already known, appears to be a very uneconomical eventuality, as this would represent the only source exploited for a single-episode interpolation in the chronicle. On the other hand, the few additions derived from materials which cannot be traced back to the learned sources listed above are all very limited and quite concise. The account of Gormond, on the contrary, involves a long passage. Thus, the analysis of this short epic interpolation in the light of the compilation technique of the French chronicle allows us to suggest that the compiler of the *Chronique française* did not derive the Gormond account from a learned (monastic) source — he may even have used non-written material, such as memories of a *chanson* belonging to his cultural milieu, recording its most significant elements — and that the Gormond and Isembart episode was of great interest to the compiler, and was thus given a significant amount of space.

It is certainly worth stressing that the Gormond and Isembart epic is exploited very differently by Mousket and by the Anonymous of Béthune. Indeed, the latter records only the military aspects of the legend, while Mousket summarizes the whole narrative. In particular, it is interesting that the Anonymous of Béthune is the only French chronicler to connect the mention of Raoul de Cambrai with any military considerations. The mention of Raoul can be found also in Philippe Mousket and Baudoin d'Avesnes, but they do not connect it to any military activity, and simply recall the blood tie uniting the two great renegades of French epic. The Anonymous of Béthune says instead that King Louis's struggle against Raoul caused such a destruction of the French army that resistance against Gormond was seriously imperilled ('il

ot tant de chevaliers ocis que s'os en fu molt mendre'). The same analysis is only to be found elsewhere in the much earlier Walter Map.²⁹

If the hypothesis that the Gormond and Isembart account in the *Chronique française* derives from a non-learned historiographical source stands, we should note that the narrative is interpolated into a very suitable context. This context is the narrative of the events at the origin of the epic, namely the Viking incursions culminating in the battle of Saucourt which took place during the reign of Louis III.

What is remarkable is that, in the portrayal of Louis III and the narration of his death, the *Chronique française* differs completely from both its main

²⁹ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium — Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. by M. R. James, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 441–43: 'Rex autem Francie, predictus Lodouicus Grossus, uir maximus erat corpore, nec minor operibus et mente. Lodouicus filius Karoli magni iacturam omnium optimatum Francie fere totiusque milicie Francorum apud Euore per stultam superbiam Radulfi Cambrensis nepotis sui pertulit. Satis egre rexit ab illa die regnum Francorum ad aduentum usque Gurmundi cum Ysembardo, contra quos cum residuis Francorum bellum in Pontiuo commisit, uictorque reuersus est cum paucissimo comitatu, cesis hostibus suis pro parte maiori, recedensque decessit in breui, tam lesione quam labore predicti prelii cum lamentis et luctu totius Francie communiter. Ab illius Lodouici decessu non recessit a Francia gladius, donec misertus Dominus hunc misit Ludouicum. Hic autem cum esset iunior, portas egredi Parisius ad miliare tercium non potuit sine principum proximorum licentia uel conductu, sed nec suum eorum quispiam aut tenebat aut timebat imperium. [...] Excitauit eum tanquam dormientem Dominus, deditque belli sentenciam et uictorie frequentem gratiam, et compleuit labores illius ad summam unitatem et pacem totius Francie.'

On the mention of Raoul de Cambrai and the Gormond and Isembart legend within the *De nugis curialium* see Alberto Vàrvaro, *Apparizioni fantastiche: tradizioni folcloriche e letteratura nel medioevo: Walter Map* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), pp. 44–45: 'per Walter non vi è qui opposizione tra [...] storia e leggenda. [...] Tutta la realtà, passata e presente, è interpretata e narrata secondo gli schemi forniti dal racconto tradizionale', and 'la poesia epica, nel caso specifico le canzoni di *Raoul de Cambrai* e di *Gormond et Isembart*, viene interamente recuperata alla storia, assunta come fonte per il passato della corona di Francia. [...] Le enormi perdite subite dal Luigi epico [...] valgono addirittura a spiegare la debolezza, ancora all'inizio del sec. XII, dello storico re Luigi VI, il cui dominio non andava oltre il terzo miglio alle porte di Parigi'.

source, the *Historia regum Francorum*, and the Annals of Saint Vaast, the most reputable historical report of the time.³⁰ At the date 881–82, the Annals state that Louis III's death was accidental, unrelated to the battle of Saucourt. In the *Historia*, however, the young, brave and promising king of the Annals

³⁰ See 'Annales Vedastini', ed. by R. Rau, in *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters: VI. Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, 2 vols (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1958), II, 289–337 (pp. 298–302); for the report of Louis III's death in the *Historia regum Francorum usque ad annum 1214* (see note 26 above): 'Anno Domini DCCCLXXXI. Nortmanni vero cum infinita multitudo monasterium nostrum ingressi VII. Kal. Ianuarii, interfectis omnibus quos invenire poterant, igne cremaverunt omnemque terram usque Sumnam pervagati sunt, capta præda infinita hominum, pecudum et iumentorum. [...] Et circa purificationem sanctæ Mariæ iterum moventes, per Turennam iter arripientes usque Centula monasterium sancti Richarii et sancti Walerici, omnia loca circa mare, monasteria et vicos indeque Ambianis civitatem atque Corbeiam monasterium petentes multisque honusti prædis, sani et sine impedimento ad propria repedavere castra. Iterum circa sollempnitatem sancti Petri Atrebatis venerunt omnesque quos ibi repperere interfecere et circuita omni terra, ferro et igne cuncta vastantes, sani revertunt ad castra.

Interim Hludowicus rex gravi dolore contristatus, videns regnum deleri, convocato exercitu præparat se ad prælium. At Nortmanni omnia prospera agentes cum magno exercitu fluvium Sumnam mense Iulio transeunt, cuncta vastantes more solito usque prope civitatem Belvagorum. Hludowicus vero rex cum exercitu transiens Hisam fluvium Latverum tendere cœpit, quo credebat Nortmannos redire. Missis itaque exploratoribus, nuntiant redire eos honustus a præda. Contra quos rex ire perrexit obviavitque eos in pago Witmau, in villa quæ dicebatur Sathulcurtis, et commissum est prælium. Moxque Nortmanni fugam ineunt atque dictam villa deveniunt; quos rex insecutus est gloriosissimeque de eis triumphavit. Et patrata victoria ex parte cœperunt gloriari suis hoc actum viribus et non dederunt gloriam Deo. Paucique Nortmanni ex dicta villa egressi, omne exercitum vertit in fugam, pluresque ex eis, videlicet usque ad centum homines, interfecerunt; et nisi rex citius equo descendens locum resistendi et audaciam suis donaret, omnes turpiter ex eodem loco fugiendo abirent. Hac vero patrata victoria, quia multos contigit ibi ruere Nortmannos, rex ovans repedavit trans Hisam, perpauci vero dani, qui evasere, interim suorum nuntiavere in castra, indeque Nortmanni Hludowicus regem adolescentem timere cœperunt [...].

Anno Domini DCCCLXXXII. [...] Hludowicus vero rex Ligerem petiit Nortmannos volens e regno suo eicere atque Alstingum in amicitiam recipere, quot et fecit. Sed quia iuvenis erat, quandam puellam, filiam cuiusdam Germundi, insecutus est; illa in domo paterno fugiens, rex equo sedens iocando eam insecutus scapulas superliminare et pectus sella equi attrivit eumque valide confregit. Unde egrotare cœpit et delatus apud Sanctum Dionisium, Nonis Augusti defunctus maximum dolorem Francis reliquit, sepultusque est in æcclesia sancti Dionisii.'

becomes a coward put to flight by the wildness of the Vikings. The reasons behind this manipulation by the author of the *Historia* are as unknown as the tradition which led him to set the final battle in Tours. Because, if possible, even less is known of the Latin historical tradition of the 13th century than of the French one, no well-founded hypothesis can be made on this front. This notwithstanding, it is not impossible that the *Historia*'s silence on Saucourt is due to a limited circulation of any record of the battle within the Latin learned tradition as well. The *Historia*, indeed, was written in the Paris area, while the battle seems only to have been famous in the North-East of France.

In the French *Chronique*, the 'original' opinion (that is to say, the one found in the Annals of Saint Vaast) regarding the fate of Louis III is restored, but it depends on the king's victorious fight against Gormond. The Anonymous's note that 'Looy's se fist molt haïr a pluisors' is also worth mentioning. Indeed, it seems to be connected with the Latin *Historia* and its harsh judgement of Louis as a 'vir plenus omnibus immundiciis et vanitatibus'. The French compiler converted his source's categorical statement about Louis into a simple opinion, albeit a widespread one.

On the devastation of St Pierre de Corbie and Amiens, the *Chronique* is in agreement with the Latin *Historia*. As far the mention of St Riquier (also found in the Saint-Vaast Annals) is concerned, we must not forget that the abbey is strongly linked to the epic of Gormond and Isembart. The pillage and arson of Saint Riquier are indeed prominent elements of the story both in the Brussels fragment and in the indirect tradition, and one should keep in mind that the oldest reference to the epic comes from a monk of Saint Riquier, Hariulf.³¹

Shortly before coming to Louis' death, the narrative of Anonymous of Béthune focuses on the involvement of the women of Amiens in the battle against Gormond and on the subsequent reversal of the seats between men and women in the city cathedral. Awareness of the connection to the legend of

³¹ Zenker, *Das Epos*, pp. 85–86.

Gormond of this particular of local tradition must have been relatively widespread. It can also be found in the *Actuarium* of Nicolas d'Amiens and in *Loher und Mallart*.³² Among those chroniclers writing in French, however, the Anonymous of Béthune is the only one who makes mention of it. As with many other interpolations found throughout the text, this detail testifies to an attentiveness towards ancient deeds and their connections to local religious traditions which is typical of monastic culture. It thus backs up the hypothesis of the *Chronique*'s close connection to monastic milieux up to a very late point in the process which led to the text we now possess.

5. Gormond and Isembart within the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*

As already mentioned, the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* has a vast manuscript tradition. The few scholars who have studied this work, which seems to have been one of the 'best sellers' of late medieval historiography, agree on a division of the fifty extant manuscripts into two different redactions. Having been unable to examine the whole tradition in depth, we have concentrated our investigations on two of the oldest manuscripts. One, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 17264, belongs to the first redaction, the other, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 15460, to the second redaction of the *Chronique*.³³ The two passages that we will be discussing below appear to be absolutely identical in the two manuscripts, so we have deemed it reasonable to follow the older manuscript, BnF fr. 17264, when copying them here.

In the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* the Gormond and Isembart legend appears in two different passages, within a narration which seems to

³² Zenker, *Das Epos*, p. 25; *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, 38 vols (Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani 1826–2000), VI, 474; Lot, 'Études sur les légendes épiques françaises [...] *Gormond et Isembart*', p. 7, n. 2.

³³ Both manuscripts are available on Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, respectively at <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9060894s>> and <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9061480p>> (accessed 24 September 2014). For the two redactions of the *Chronique*, see Johannes Heller, 'Ueber die Herrn Balduin von Avesnes zugeschriebene Hennegauer Chronik und verwandte Quellen', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für Ältere Deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 6 (1881), 129–51, and Bayot, 'La première partie', pp. 419–32.

combine a summarized version of the *Descriptio qualiter Carolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit qualiterque Carolus Calvus hec ad S. Dionysium retulerit* and Guillaume de Jumièges (the first one used, as we have seen, in the *Chronique* of the Anonymous of Béthune, the second in the *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre*).

The first passage to mention Gormond is set within the introduction to the reign of Louis IV d'Outremer and has been already noted by Paul Meyer and Auguste Longnon:³⁴

MS BnF fr. 17264, fols 58^rb–58^va³⁵

Mais or vous lairons .i. poi a parler de lui, si vous dirons dou roi Raoul de Franche qui gouvrena le roiaume .iii. ans et puis morut. Dont remanderent li baron, par le conseil le duc Guillaume de Normendie, ki molt s'en travailla, Loeys le fils Charlon [Louis IV d'Outremer], qui estoit en Engletierre avoec le roi Antiaume si com nous avons dit desus.

Quant il fu venus en Franche, il fu courounés a Loon. Il avoit .ii. serours que ses peres avoit mariees a son vivant. Li aisnee avoit non Heluis: cele ot espousee li dus Garins qui tenoit Pontiu et Vimeu et les alués Saint Waleri; elle fu mere Yzembart qui amena le roi Gormont de cha le mer pour Franche guerroiier. L'autre suer ot non Aelays, si fu dounee a Taillefer de Chambresis qui ot de li Raoul, ki puis ot grant guerre contre Bernenchon de Saint-Quentin. Cil rois Loeys prist a feme Gerberge la fille le roi Othon de Saisongne qui puis fu empe[58^va]reres de Roume. Or vous dirai apries cui il regna.

The second reference to the Gormond and Isembart legend in the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* is to be found in the chapter reporting the death of Louis d'Outremer and was known at least to Ferdinand Lot:³⁶

³⁴ *Raoul de Cambrai, chanson de geste*, ed. by Paul Meyer and Auguste Longnon (Paris: Didot, 1882), pp. xlv–xlv.

³⁵ The passage can be found at fols 84^vb–85^ra of MS BnF fr. 15460.

MS BnF fr. 17264, fol. 61^ra–b³⁷

En che tans avint li descors entre le roi Loys et Yzembart son neu. Par coi il couvient Yzembart widier Franche, et s'en ala au roi Gormont qui li douna sa fille et li fist diu renoyer. Puys l'amena Yzembars a grant ost contre le roi Loeys. Si arriva en Pontiu. Et orent bataille ensamble grant et perilleuse. Mais en la fin i fu mors Yzembars et li sarrasin desconfi et ochis la plus grant partie et li remanans s'en fui. Li rois meismes [61^rb] i pierdi moult des siens et il meismes i fu naurés si griement que il ne vesqui gaires apries, ains morut quant il ot regné .xxvij. ans. Si fu enfouis a Rains. Il avoit .ij. fius de la roine Gerberge: Lohiers li ainsnés fu courounés et li autres ot non Charles de cui il issi grans lignié; et por chou que vous en orres encore per pluseurs fois parler, vous en noumerai grant partie.

As suggested by Meyer and Longnon, it is highly possible that the compiler of the *Chronique of Baudoin d'Avesnes* derived his information about Gormond and Isembart from the *Chronique* of Philippe Mousket.³⁸ This supposition is supported by the fact that the king fighting against Isembart is Louis IV, son of Charles III the Simple (Philippe Mousket: 'Loéis, ki fu fius Charlon', 14025), and that his coronation takes place in Laon (Philippe Mousket: 'A Léun, en la mestre sale, / al couronner ot moult grant ale', 14039–40). It is, in any case, the genealogy of Louis d'Outremer which appears to be the most revealing aspect, as Theodor Fluri noticed.³⁹ Louis is said to have two sisters, Herluis, married to Garin de Ponthieu and Vimeu, and Aélis married to Taillefer de Cambrésis, who gave birth to Isembart and to Raoul de Cambrai respectively. In addition, as Ferdinand Lot has already pointed out, the so-called *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* and Philippe

³⁶ Lot, 'Études sur les légendes épiques françaises [...] *Gormond et Isembart*', p. 5, n. 3, etc.

³⁷ The passage can be found at fols 86^vb–87^ra of MS BnF fr. 15460.

³⁸ *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. Meyer and Longnon, p. xlv. It is worth stressing that this eventuality is of great importance with regard of the circulation of Philippe Mousket's *Chronique rimée*, which for the rest seems to have been unknown to its contemporaries and posterity.

³⁹ Theodor Fluri, *Isembart et Gormont: Entwicklung der Sage und historische Grundlage* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1895), p. 55, and Lot, 'Études sur les légendes épiques françaises [...] *Gormond et Isembart*', p. 7, n. 2.

Mousket (and the older *Lohier und Mallart*) agree that the father of Isembart was called Garin, while in the Brussels fragment Isembart's father is called Bernart ('survint le viel Bernard; / le pere fut meistre Isembart', 560–61), and the fiefs of Ponthieu and Saint-Valéry are assigned to Ernaut ('Eis vus Ernaut, qui tint Pontif / e les aloez Saint Valerin', 165–66).⁴⁰ The listing of the fiefs of Garin de Ponthieu are almost identical in the *Chronique de Baudoin* ('li dus Garins qui tenoit Pontiu et Vimeu et les alués Sain Waleri') and in Philippe Mousket:

Herluis ot à non l'ainsnée
si fu al duc Garin dounée,
ki tenoit Vimeu et Ponti
et les aluès St.-Waleri. (14053–56)

The *Chronique rimée* and the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* also agree on the marriage of Isembart to Gormond's daughter, a detail which Rudolph Zenker finds only in Philippe Mousket and thinks to be a later invention ('spätere Erfindung'), owing its origin to the topos of the Saracen princess married to the Christian hero.⁴¹

A third element — the absence of any mention of Gormond's death in the *Chronique de Baudoin* — could also be explained through Philippe Mousket. Before arriving at such a hypothesis, a consideration of how the French compiler used the epic material which he handled is needed.

As we have seen, the compiler of the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* divides the reference to the Gormond and Isembart legend in two. He recalls the kinship between Louis and Isembart while enumerating Louis's brothers and sisters and his other family ties. The account of the war between the king and Isembart, on the other hand, concludes the narration devoted to Louis's reign. From the basic tale of Gormond, the compiler of the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* has selected a very few elements — even fewer

⁴⁰ Zenker, *Das Epos*, p. 55.

⁴¹ Zenker, *Das Epos*, p. 37.

than the Anonymous of Béthune. He reports that Isembart, Louis of France's nephew, was obliged to quit his fiefs and to escape to Gormond; that the pagan king gave his daughter in marriage to the exile and made him abjure the Christian faith; that Isembart went back to France with the Saracens in order to wage war on king Louis. The Saracen army arrives in Ponthieu; a battle 'grande et perillieuse' takes place in an unspecified location. During the battle, Isembart is killed, the Saracens are defeated and Louis is fatally wounded. As has already been said, no mention is made of Gormond, whose fate remains unknown. It is impossible to say if this lack of information is due to a deliberate choice by the compiler of the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*, or some other factor. Nevertheless, it is worth stressing that in Philippe Mousket's *Chronique* the death of Gormond is cursorily recalled at the start of the battle between the French and the Saracens — almost seventy verses before the end of the narration dedicated to Gormond and Isembart:

S'i commença grans la bataille
et li estours ruistes et fors.
Moult i ot de nos François mors,
et Gormons et li Sarrasin
furent tout ocis en la fin. (14228–32)

Even without conclusive evidence, the unusual positioning of the reference to Gormond's death in Philippe Mousket could be the cause for the lack of any mention of it in the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*.

To return to the framing of the epic of Gormond and Isembart in the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes*, it is important to underline that the same compilation technique evident in the brief passage just discussed has been observed elsewhere. Indeed, Alphonse Bayot noted that in the portion of the chronicle devoted to ancient history the sources are very well utilized.⁴² In

⁴² Bayot, 'La première partie', pp. 428–29: 'dans notre *Chronique*, il y a un effort visible pour fondre ces divers éléments et en même temps pour les condenser. [...] Par là, au défaut d'une valeur historique spéciale, la première partie de la *Chronique de Baudoin d'Avesnes* ne laisse pas de présenter de l'intérêt pour l'histoire littéraire.'

particular, a great effort is made to condense and blend the different materials employed, which mainly coincide with those of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*. Around the central thread of Sacred History — the undisputed core of the narrative — are woven chapters devoted to the description of ancient peoples, to the teaching given by Aristotle to Alexander and even to a small didactic treatise deriving from ancient philosophers. The result is a fine-knit *entrelacement*, a historical narration that, even if not original, is of notable literary value, and which, in our opinion, deserves much more attentive study

6. Conclusions

This *excursus* on the use of epic themes within the French vernacular historiographical tradition does not aim to list all of the epic stories referred to by medieval historians, but rather to reflect on some aspects and dynamics of medieval culture, literary production and circulation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, concerns which are scarcely taken into account by modern scholars.

Various factors recommended the epic additions within historiographical compilations as a promising new field of inquiry. On the one hand, this subject matter can shed new light on both epic and historiographical works, considered on their own terms, and also help us understand how (and where) epic legends and stories circulated and how historiographical texts were composed. On the other hand, this inquiry gives us the opportunity to underline the importance of historiography within the literary system of the Middle Ages and the complexity of the problems it raises, both from a philological point of view (sources, compilation techniques, manuscript tradition) and from a theoretical one.

Our overall approach develops from the awareness that medieval historiographical texts in French have been somewhat neglected by literary and philological scholarship, which predominantly makes use of them in discussions of literary tradition. It has frequently been taken for granted that vernacular historiography is irrelevant to literary studies, so that very little

attention has been paid both to the æsthetic features of these works and to the role (a substantial one, judging from the vast quantity of manuscripts we possess) they played in the culture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At the same time, medieval chronicles in French pertaining to a monastic milieu have been taken into account only marginally by historians, as these texts are frequently put together from second-hand materials and seldom relate first-hand reports. What is more, epic insertions — as distortions of the real events through the influence of a literary tradition — are completely neglected by modern historians, to whom they appear to provide evidence only of an unreliability which casts a dubious light on the work as a whole.

We hope that, despite the limited number of examples on which we have worked, we have succeeded in showing that epic interpolations within medieval chronicles are of great interest not only from the archæological perspective — that is to say, for the reconstruction of lost epic poems or lost redactions of extant poems — but that they also allow us to understand better the texts into which such epic references are inserted. Medieval chronicles must not only be considered as the two-dimensional background for these epic insertions, but as a wide and complex body of texts, in which epic elements have a specific role and function. The analysis of these elements is, then, of great value to the understanding of the texts that contain them, from both synchronic and diachronic points of view.

Indeed, epic additions can help us to clarify how medieval vernacular historians worked: which elements they found to be deserving of mention, and according to which criteria they oriented their compilations. It is evident from the examples discussed here that in the Anonymous of Béthune's *Chronique* and the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* the addition of the same legendary motif is due to different interests and is carried out through different compilation techniques. These differences are of the utmost importance when considering that medieval chronicles in French derive the majority of their materials from extant written, cultured sources, which are often incredibly

widespread and shared by many different vernacular works.⁴³ Thus, epic additions can help us to focus on the characteristics and interests of the compilers.

Although a close analysis of the texts is necessary for any general assertion, it does not seem unreasonable to say that epic additions were used as a way to make chronicles familiar to their public. The insertion of epic legends was a means to link the story of French kings to the collective imagination and to the public's (and author's) world and system of values. Discussing the reasons which led *jongleurs* and writers to insert specific place names in *chansons de geste*, Rita Lejeune made an observation which can easily be extended to our case-study: 'il fallait bien frapper l'auditeur par des détails qui l'intéressaient directement. Il fallait bien lui fournir au passage quelques noms et quelques pratiques qui lui rendaient plus proche, donc plus cher, un héros parfois lointain.'⁴⁴ Philippe Mousket and both the anonymous authors to whom we owe the *Chronique française des rois de France* and the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* come from the north-eastern regions of France. This shows that the epic of Gormond and Isembart remained closely tied to these lands from its start to the latest of its manifestations; and that historians thought their readers were interested in it up to the late thirteenth century. The function of epic insertions could also have been to liven up narratives which, for many reasons, risked being rather dry, repetitive and difficult to comprehend.⁴⁵ A question, far too large to be answered here,

⁴³ We have seen that works as distant from one another as the *Chronique française des rois de France* and the *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre* of the Anonymous of Béthune on one side, and the *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* on the other share materials such as the *Descriptio qualiter Carolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit qualiterque Carolus Calvus hec ad S. Dionysium retulerit* and Guillaume de Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum ducum*, although with very different degrees of elaboration.

⁴⁴ Lejeune, *Recherches sur le thème*, p. 244.

⁴⁵ An interesting, if cursory, reflection on this aspect appears in Georges Duby, 'Remarques sur la littérature généalogique en France aux XI^e et XII^e siècles', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 111 (1967), 335–45 (p. 343). Even if we do not share Duby's conclusions on the whole, we find it useful to recall the

remains as to how the medieval public conceived of the difference between fiction and non-fiction, and to what degree the *chansons de geste* were understood, and accepted, as historical sources in the Middle Ages.

The results of this study are, for many reasons, open to further development; nevertheless, our research has helped us to focus on certain issues which deserve fresh consideration. We wish to conclude by suggesting these.

First, a new investigation of the French prose chronicles of the thirteenth century is needed. Such a study would be valuable in clarifying the interests and cultural attitudes of certain intellectual and social milieux of the time. Moreover, it could provide important findings with regard to a broader view of medieval French literature (for example, the integration of the popular *Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes* with the texts in which the technique of the *entrelacement* is displayed). The almost complete lack of interest in medieval historiography in French on the part of modern scholars has, indeed, resulted in the undervaluing of a huge corpus of vernacular prose, which includes some of the oldest and most widespread long French texts, sometimes with finely constructed narratives.

Second, we are in need of a new reflection on the relationships between history, historiography and epic in the Middle Ages. This is demonstrated by

passage *in extenso*, as one of the first analyses of this subject: 'Il convient ici d'évoquer les rapports qu'entretiennent les écrits généalogiques du XII^e siècle avec les légendes épiques. Leurs auteurs, en effet, n'utilisent pas seulement des textes, mais aussi les histoires qui circulent dans l'entourage du seigneur. [...] Cette ouverture sur la légende et sur l'imaginaire est fort importante à deux points de vue. Elle explique d'abord la place ménagée aux héros dans les nouvelles généalogies, qui prennent désormais l'allure d'une galerie de types exemplaires, modèles de vertu. Dans son armature profonde, je l'ai dit, la généalogie relate la transmission d'un titre, d'un patrimoine. Mais elle prend subsidiairement après 1100 un autre caractère lorsque, sous l'influence des récits épiques et par l'introduction de biographies plus étoffées, elle tend à devenir une suite d'éloges individuels. [...] Devenant exemplaire, cette littérature s'insère parfaitement dans le climat de concours permanent qui baigne, autour du prince, le milieu des jeunes.'

the fact that both epic and historiographical texts conveyed a message which was regarded as truth. The question remains whether a boundary between the two genres existed, and whether determining how epic themes entered historiographical works could help us trace any such boundary. Such a line of inquiry appears to be most needed in the case of French monastic chronicles. Any discussion of these works, indeed, seems stuck in an almost nineteenth-century outlook, which is well summed up in Meyer and Longnon's comments on the *Chronicon Valciodorensis* and its use of the epic of Raoul de Cambrai:

Il [the *Chronicon*] nous montre avec quelle facilité les chroniqueurs acceptaient comme histoire réelle des compositions où la fiction avait une très grande part. Ce n'était donc pas seulement aux yeux des illettrés que les chansons de geste passaient pour de l'histoire. D'autres témoignages montrent que pendant longtemps les historiens ont cru aux récits fabuleux que les jongleurs récitaient sur Raoul de Cambrai.⁴⁶

Our wish is not to undermine the respect which is due to great scholars of past generations; in the particular subject of our research we are, indeed, greatly indebted to them. Those scholars remain the only ones to have invested significant time and effort into studying the historiographical works to which we are endeavouring to draw attention. Our hope is that these texts will be the object of renewed interest. In particular, we believe that the time has come to move beyond dichotomies such as true and false, literary and non-literary, which have, for too long, prevented these texts from receiving the attention they deserve.

⁴⁶ *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. Meyer and Longnon., p. xl.

Appendix 1. Structure of the *Chronique française des Rois de France* by the Anonymous of Béthune

Contents	Exploited sources	Available sources
From the fall of Troy to the early reign of Charlemagne	α	α, γ
Pseudo-Turpin chronicle	Contamination between α and β	α, β
Charlemagne's trip to the Holy Land	α	α
From the death of Charlemagne to the struggles among Louis the Pious' sons	γ	α, γ
Reign of Charles the Bald	α and γ , copied consecutively	α, γ
From the death of Charles the Bald to the beginning of the reign of Charles the Simple	γ	γ
From the reign of Charles the simple to around 1185	γ	α, γ
From around 1185 to 1217	No one; original account	α, γ
From 1217 to 1227	No one; original account	maybe α

source α : primary core of the compilation, it comprises a version of the Pseudo-Turpin chronicle called *Turpin I*, contaminated and reworked in both style and contents and embedded in a French history of kings of France drawn from the *Abbreviatio gestorum regum Francorum* and from the *Descriptio qualiter Carolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit qualiterque Carolus Calvus hec ad S. Dionysium retulerit*.

source β : the French translation of the Pseudo-Turpin chronicle called *Turpin I*, in a version close to that preserved in the manuscript Paris, BnF, MS fr. 1850.

source γ : the Latin work called *Historia regum Francorum usque ad annum 1214* or a French translation of it.

Appendix 2. Philippe Mousket's account of the *Gormond and Isembart* Legend

A Léun, en la mestre sale,
 Al couronner ot moult grant ale.
 XXXI roi à cest vos cont,
 Si com l'estore le despont
 Par çaus ki sèvent les escriis.
 S'ot I frère cis Loéys;
 Lohiers ot non, s'ot Loherainne,
 Et si tint Ais en son demainne,
 Et s'ot une serour ainsnée,
 Gillain que Rou ot espousée.
 S'ot cis rois II autres serors,
 Qui tières tinrent et honors.
 Ses pères loe ot asénées,
 A son vivant et mariées.
 Herluis ot à non l'ainsnée;
 Si fu al duc Garin dounée,
 Ki tenoit Vimeu et Ponti
 Et les aluès St.-Waleri:
 De çou fu Herluis douwée.
 Aélais l'autre fu dounée
 A Taillefier del Kanbresis
 Qui moult fu vallans et gentis.
 Si en ot Raoul le Cuvier,
 Qui gueroia les fies Herbiert
 De St.-Quentin, et Bierneçon
 Féri el chief par contençon,
 Si arst les nounains d'Origni;
 Mais puis l'en aviunt-il einsi,
 S'en fu ocis et dépeciés,
 Quar il ot fais maus et péciés.
 Et de madame Herluit
 Dont je vous ai ci devant dit.
 Qu'espousée ot li dus Garins,
 Fu Isembars et Girardins. (14039–72)

Par le conseil d'Évrart l'Englois,
 Ki ot apris sarrasinois,
 Al roi Gormont par mer s'en va.
 A l'uitisme jour ariva,
 Et Gormons l'a bien retenu,
 Pour çou que biaux bacelers fu;
 Mais Dieu li a fait renoiier,
 Ki garit l'avoit de noier.
 Mais moult en ot son cuer mari,
 Si le clama le Margari.
 Puis venqui-il I aumaçour
 Qui li voloit tolir s'ounour.
 Gormons bien li gueredouna,
 Margot, sa fille, li douna,
 Et si li douna Bocidante,
 Une grant tière en oriante,
 Et puis a fait tant Ysembars
 Que Gormons fist nés et canars. (14125–42)

Adonques France tele estoit,
 Que quant I haus om i moroit
 Li rois prenoit la tière toute
 Et des dames, sans nule doute,
 Recevoit à force relief:
 Trop estoient mauvais li fief.
 Quant ces nouveles dist Gautiers,
 Huélins, uns grans cevaliers,
 Les oï; si a dit au roi.
 S'il voloit laiscier son desroi,
 Et les reliés quites clamer,
 Et ses barons vosist amer,
 A l'ost de Sarrasins iroit
 Et leur pooir li rediroit.
 Li rois l'otroia esranment,
 Puis en jura le sairement. (14157–72)

S'i commença grans la bataille
Et li estours ruistes et fors.
Moult i ot de nos François mors,
Et Gormons et li Sarrasin
Furent tout ocis en la fin. (14228–32)

Et Loéys, cil rois saçans,
Fu desrompus par Ludemart
Et par son signour Ysenbart,
A l'estordre k'il fist à aus,
Quant i joustà comme vasaus.
Moult le fist bien à la bataille,
Et tant i fu bléciés, sans falle,
Que XXX jous ne vesqui puis,
Ce dist l'estore ù je le truis. (14288–96)